

Macalester professor's research finds positive and non-conflicted racial identities among multiracial 10-13 year-olds

St. Paul, Minn. – Psychology Professor Cari Gillen-O'Neel, the lead author in an article in the March issue of *Journal of Adolescent Research* (<http://jar.sagepub.com/content/30/2/143>) titled “Not Excluded From Analyses: Ethnic and Racial Meanings and Identification Among Multiethnic/Racial Early Adolescents” found, after interviewing 102 multiracial early adolescents, that they were positive and non-conflicted when it came to which racial groups they identified with and what it meant to them to be members of those groups.

Gillen-O'Neel and her group examined the following:

- What are the different ways that multiracial early adolescents racially identify?
- What are some of the reasons that multiracial early adolescents give for their identification?
- Do multiracial early adolescents show the same developmental shift in racial understanding that has been observed among monoracial kids?

According to Gillen-O'Neel, since existing developmental research has primarily focused on children with monoracial heritage, she and her group primarily focused on the 45 participants in their sample who had mixed racial heritage.

Their results indicated that multiracial early adolescents have a variety of ways of racially identifying: about half identified with a single minority group (e.g., African American), a few identified with a single majority group (e.g., European American), about 10 percent identified non-racially (e.g., “just American”), and about a third identified with all parts of their heritage. These results were consistent with previous research among multiracial adults, suggesting that early adolescents are already exploring the complexities of their racial identities.

“When we asked multiracial participants why they identified as they did and what their heritage meant to them, the types of answers they gave were very similar to those of their monoracial peers: they mentioned tangible aspects of identity like eating certain foods, social aspects of identity like how it affects their interactions with others, and individual aspects of identity like feeling proud of their heritage,” said Gillen-O'Neel. “This last finding was particularly encouraging because early studies of multiracial youth suggested that they may be at risk of identity conflict and confusion. Our participants, however, were overwhelmingly positive and non-conflicted about their identity.”



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Gillen-O'Neel chose to research multiracial children because although they are among the fastest growing groups of people in the U.S., they are one of the most understudied. There are approximately 4.2 million multiracial children currently in the United States, and they are the fastest growing racial group in the country, increasing nearly 50 percent from 2000 to 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Previous research with multiracial individuals has almost exclusively focused on adults.

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